

ALASKA STATE MUSEUMS

ALASKA STATE MUSEUM, JUNEAU ❖ SHELDON JACKSON MUSEUM, SITKA

PRESS RELEASE

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SUMMER 2007: TRADITIONS TRANSLATED INTO SOUVENIRS AND FINE ART

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
FOR MORE INFORMATION:**

Bruce Kato, 465-2901

From kitschy souvenirs to sublime jewelry, Native traditions blend with modern sensibilities in two special exhibits this summer at the Alaska State Museum. One exhibit explores the broad influences of tourism on Alaska culture and art through the ephemera tourists bring home, while the other exhibit provides a 25-year retrospective of prominent Alaska Native jewelers Denise and Samuel Wallace. Both shows open May 12.

The Lure of Alaska: A History of Tourism in the Great Land explores the history of tourism in Alaska from the 1880's steamship travel through the current scope of all that tourism is in Alaska today. It will take us on a journey through time, highlighting the early tourism industry that coincided with the gold rushes when excursionists mingled with stampedeers.

The show will look at how Alaska has always been a perfect place for tourism because it has the exotic, the picturesque, and the sublime all within reach of the tourist. How early tourism promoters were able to build on Alaska's mythic status will be illustrated through the use of historic photographs and colorful travel brochures. This advertising material enticed tourists to sail the Inside Passage, scramble across glaciers, or drive the rugged Alaska Highway as imagined pioneers. The tourist industry's influence and impact on the economy, cultures and Alaska social structure and communities will also be a focus of the exhibit.

The exhibition object list has been pared down from the literally thousands of objects that guest curator June Hall identified as relevant. She gathered about 400 souvenir items from 11 museums and private collections across the state for the exhibit, some of them never previously displayed. A recreated late nineteenth-century curio store interior will be crowded floor to ceiling with all types of items popular during that era – bird quill belts, billikens, baskets, ivory carvings, souvenir china, gold jewelry, dolls and beaded wall pockets. More recent souvenirs like totem poles shaped into bookends, bottle openers and candles will show the appropriation of traditional images for popular use. The exhibition will bring to life characters from Alaska's past who intrigued tourists and

symbolized life on the Last Frontier, including a rare automaton figure of the infamous Soapy Smith from a bar in Skagway. The show will remain open through Oct. 14.

“A lot of the themes that have lured people to Alaska are still the ones that lure them to Alaska today; they want to know there’s a vast wilderness that is not trampled by other people,” Hall said. “Certainly the first tourists were motivated by the desire to experience something out of the ordinary and they wanted to bring back a memento symbolic of their experience just as they do today.” Tourist observations and opinions about their Alaska adventure will be readable in the huge postcard display, from the very first Alaska postcard issued in 1897 to more recent examples.

Savvy Tlingit and Haida people quickly responded to the demand of tourists by creating new art forms, usually miniature versions of totem poles, paddles and other household items, specifically for the tourist trade. Native artists also turned silver dollars into spoons and bracelets to meet tourist demand.

At the turn of the century, tourists were already lamenting the appearance of outside influences, such as American eagles and scrollwork, in Native art. These early souvenirs are a valuable historic record of how Native cultures in Alaska and the rest of the United States adapted their styles, materials and techniques to the new market, Hall said.

The other summer exhibit, *Arctic Transformations: the Jewelry of Denise and Samuel Wallace*, provides a gleaming example of Native artists using new materials and modern techniques to convey traditional images.

Working in gold, silver, semi-precious stones and walrus ivory, the Wallaces translate traditional stories into sculptural jewelry. Often they are inspired by Denise’s Chugach Aleut heritage or the stories of other indigenous Alaskans.

Denise trained at the Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe. For ten years she and Samuel produced an annual show of Alaskan art called “Visions of Alaska” from their jewelry studio. This 25-year retrospective of the couple’s work includes 150 pieces of jewelry and 16 belts, seen together for the first time.

An element of transformation runs through the Wallaces’ jewelry: Rings flip open to reveal a face behind the mask. The figure of a baby can be taken from its mother’s arms and worn alone. Pieces detach from intricate belts to be worn as earrings, pins or pendants.

The *Arctic Transformations* exhibition comes to the Alaska State Museum after touring the world, with stops at the National Museum of the American Indian and The George Gustav Heye Center in New York, the Heard Museum in Phoenix, the Four Winds Gallery in Sydney, Australia, the Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe, and the Mingei International Museum in San Diego. It remains open through Sept. 15.

In addition to these temporary presentations, the Alaska State Museum offers a range of permanent displays highlighting Alaska's history, indigenous cultures and natural history. These displays, which take up more than half of the museum's exhibition space, range from a life-sized eagle nesting tree to a scaled-down version of the stern of Capt. George Vancouver's ship "Discovery," dry-docked in the museum's children's room.

The museum, located in downtown Juneau, continues to collect and exhibit objects that reflect the diversity and richness of the state today. Its collection includes more than 28,000 artifacts, specimens and works of art. Among its most popular exhibits are clothing, weapons, tools and ceremonial objects from the four distinct Alaska Native populations – Northwest Coast, Eskimo, Athabascan and Aleut – as well as icons and other memorabilia from Russian America days.

Volunteers offer tours of the museum during the summer and by special arrangement during the rest of the year. The museum's store, operated by the Friends of the Alaska State Museum, features baskets, jewelry and carvings made by Alaskans, as well as books and note cards. Summer hours at the Alaska State Museum are 8:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. daily. Fall, winter and spring hours are 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday. General admission is \$5 during the summer season, \$3 at other times, with annual passes that allow unlimited visits available for \$15.

SHELDON JACKSON MUSEUM

In 1984 the State of Alaska purchased the Sheldon Jackson Museum, formerly part of Sheldon Jackson College, in Sitka.

Founded in 1888, it is the oldest continuously operated museum in Alaska. It is housed in Alaska's first concrete building, constructed in 1895 and now included on the National Register of Historic Places. The museum is located on the campus of Sheldon Jackson College in the former capital of Russian America.

The Sheldon Jackson Museum houses an exceptional collection of Alaska Native artifacts, many of them gathered by the Rev. Dr. Sheldon Jackson, a Presbyterian missionary and General Agent for Education for Alaska.

The collection is unique in part because of Dr. Jackson's opportunities in the 1880s and 1890s to visit and collect from all parts of Alaska and coastal Siberia. Jackson stated that his goal in gathering the material and opening the museum was so the "coming generations of natives" would know how their fathers lived. The collection is used by contemporary artists to "see the best specimens of the work of their ancestors." Alaska Native artists continue the practices of wood and ivory carving, basketry, textile weaving and beadwork. During the summer, the Friends of Sheldon Jackson Museum sponsors

artist demonstrators representing the Aleut, Athabascan, Yup'ik, Inupiat, Tlingit, Haida and Tsimshian cultures of Alaska.

Displays at the museum, while upgraded to meet modern museum standards, still retain the Victorian-era feel of the original exhibit design. Elaborate ceremonial regalia, utilitarian tools, weapons and clothing are exhibited in cases, while visible storage drawers hold ivory carvings, games, jewelry and other small items of household and hunting importance.

Docents interpret exhibits for summer visitors. The Friends of the Sheldon Jackson Museum operates a gift shop with fine Alaska Native crafts, books and cards. Summer hours are 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily and admission is \$4. Winter, spring and fall, hours are 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday, and admission is \$3. Visitors 18 and younger are admitted free.

For more information, contact Bruce Kato, Alaska State Museum, 395 Whittier St., Juneau, AK 99801-1718, (907) 465-2901, or bruce_kato@ed.state.ak.us. Visit our home page at: <http://www.museums.state.ak.us>.

Photos and slides from both museums are available for media use.

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PSA

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FROM KITSCHY SOUVENIRS TO SUBLIME JEWELRY, NATIVE TRADITIONS BLEND WITH MODERN SENSIBILITIES IN TWO SPECIAL EXHIBITS THIS SUMMER AT THE ALASKA STATE MUSEUM. ONE EXHIBIT EXPLORES THE BROAD INFLUENCES OF TOURISM ON ALASKA CULTURE AND ART THROUGH THE EPHEMERA TOURISTS BRING HOME, WHILE THE OTHER EXHIBIT PROVIDES A 25-YEAR RETROSPECTIVE OF PROMINENT ALASKA NATIVE JEWELERS DENISE AND SAMUEL WALLACE. BOTH SHOWS OPEN MAY 12.

THE LURE OF ALASKA: A HISTORY OF TOURISM IN THE GREAT LAND EXPLORES THE HISTORY OF TOURISM IN ALASKA, FROM THE 1880'S STEAMSHIP TRAVEL THROUGH THE CURRENT SCOPE OF ALL THAT TOURISM IS IN ALASKA TODAY. IT WILL TAKE US ON A JOURNEY THROUGH TIME, HIGHLIGHTING THE TOURISM INDUSTRY THAT COINCIDED WITH THE GOLD RUSHES.

THE EXHIBITION OBJECT LIST HAS BEEN PARED DOWN FROM THE LITERALLY THOUSANDS OF OBJECTS THAT GUEST CURATOR JUNE HALL IDENTIFIED AS RELEVANT. SHE GATHERED ABOUT 400 SOUVENIR ITEMS FROM 11 MUSEUMS AND PRIVATE COLLECTIONS ACROSS THE STATE FOR THE EXHIBIT, SOME OF THEM NEVER PREVIOUSLY DISPLAYED. THE SHOW WILL REMAIN OPEN THROUGH OCT. 14.

THE OTHER SUMMER EXHIBIT, *ARCTIC TRANSFORMATIONS: THE JEWELRY OF DENISE AND SAMUEL WALLACE* PROVIDES A GLEAMING EXAMPLE OF NATIVE ARTISTS USING NEW MATERIALS AND MODERN TECHNIQUES TO CONVEY TRADITIONAL IMAGES.

WORKING IN GOLD, SILVER, SEMI-PRECIOUS STONES AND WALRUS IVORY, THE WALLACES TRANSLATE TRADITIONAL STORIES INTO SCULPTURAL JEWELRY.

THE ARCTIC TRANSFORMATIONS EXHIBITION COMES TO THE ALASKA STATE MUSEUM AFTER TOURING THE WORLD, WITH STOPS AT THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN AND THE GEORGE GUSTAV HEYE CENTER IN NEW YORK, THE HEARD MUSEUM IN PHOENIX, THE FOUR WINDS GALLERY IN SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA, THE INSTITUTE OF AMERICAN INDIAN ARTS IN SANTA FE, AND THE MINGEI INTERNATIONAL MUSEUM IN SAN DIEGO. IT REMAINS OPEN THROUGH SEPT. 15.

IN ADDITION TO THESE TEMPORARY PRESENTATIONS, THE ALASKA STATE MUSEUM OFFERS A RANGE OF PERMANENT DISPLAYS HIGHLIGHTING ALASKA'S HISTORY, INDIGENOUS CULTURES AND NATURAL HISTORY.

THE MUSEUM, LOCATED IN DOWNTOWN JUNEAU, CONTINUES TO COLLECT AND EXHIBIT OBJECTS THAT REFLECT THE DIVERSITY AND RICHNESS OF THE STATE TODAY. ITS COLLECTION INCLUDES MORE THAN 28,000 ARTIFACTS, SPECIMENS AND WORKS OF ART.

VOLUNTEERS OFFER TOURS OF THE MUSEUM DURING THE SUMMER AND BY SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT DURING THE REST OF THE YEAR. THE MUSEUM'S STORE, OPERATED BY THE FRIENDS OF THE ALASKA STATE MUSEUM, FEATURES BASKETS, JEWELRY AND CARVINGS MADE BY ALASKANS, AS WELL AS BOOKS AND NOTE CARDS. SUMMER HOURS AT THE ALASKA STATE MUSEUM ARE 8:30 A.M. TO 5:30 P.M. DAILY. FALL, WINTER AND SPRING HOURS ARE 10 A.M. TO 4 P.M. TUESDAY THROUGH SATURDAY. GENERAL ADMISSION IS \$5 DURING THE SUMMER SEASON, \$3 AT OTHER TIMES, WITH ANNUAL PASSES THAT ALLOW UNLIMITED VISITS AVAILABLE FOR \$15.

SHELDON JACKSON MUSEUM

FOUNDED IN 1888, THE SHELDON JACKSON MUSEUM IS THE OLDEST CONTINUOUSLY OPERATED MUSEUM IN ALASKA. IT IS HOUSED IN ALASKA'S FIRST CONCRETE BUILDING, CONSTRUCTED IN 1895 AND NOW INCLUDED ON THE NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES.

THE SHELDON JACKSON MUSEUM HOUSES AN EXCEPTIONAL COLLECTION OF ALASKA NATIVE ARTIFACTS, MANY OF THEM GATHERED BY THE REV. DR. SHELDON JACKSON, A PRESBYTERIAN MISSIONARY AND GENERAL AGENT FOR EDUCATION FOR ALASKA.

THE COLLECTION IS UNIQUE IN PART BECAUSE OF DR. JACKSON'S OPPORTUNITIES IN THE 1880S AND 1890S TO VISIT AND COLLECT FROM ALL PARTS OF ALASKA AND COASTAL SIBERIA. JACKSON STATED THAT HIS GOAL IN GATHERING THE MATERIAL AND OPENING THE MUSEUM WAS SO THE "COMING GENERATIONS OF NATIVES" WOULD KNOW HOW THEIR FATHERS LIVED. THE COLLECTION IS USED BY CONTEMPORARY ARTISTS TO "SEE THE BEST SPECIMENS OF THE WORK OF THEIR ANCESTORS." ALASKA NATIVE ARTISTS CONTINUE THE PRACTICES OF WOOD AND IVORY CARVING, BASKETRY, TEXTILE WEAVING AND BEADWORK. DURING THE SUMMER, THE FRIENDS OF SHELDON JACKSON MUSEUM SPONSOR ARTIST DEMONSTRATORS REPRESENTING THE ALEUT, ATHABASCAN, YUP'IK, INUPIAT, TLINGIT, HAIDA AND TSIMSHIAN CULTURES OF ALASKA.

DOCENTS PROVIDE INTERPRETATION OF THE EXHIBITS FOR SUMMER VISITORS. THE FRIENDS OF THE SHELDON JACKSON MUSEUM OPERATE A GIFT SHOP WITH FINE ALASKA NATIVE CRAFTS, BOOKS AND CARDS. SUMMER HOURS ARE 9 A.M. TO 5 P.M. DAILY AND ADMISSION IS \$4. WINTER, SPRING AND FALL, HOURS ARE 10 A.M. TO 4 P.M. TUESDAY THROUGH SATURDAY, AND ADMISSION IS \$3. VISITORS 18 AND YOUNGER ARE ADMITTED FREE.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT BRUCE KATO, ALASKA STATE MUSEUM, 395 WHITTIER ST., JUNEAU, AK 99801-1718, (907) 465-2901, OR BRUCE_KATO@EED.STATE.AK.US. VISIT OUR HOME PAGE AT: [HTTP://WWW.MUSEUMS.STATE.AK.US](http://WWW.MUSEUMS.STATE.AK.US).

PHOTOS AND SLIDES FROM BOTH MUSEUMS ARE AVAILABLE FOR MEDIA USE.